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ABSTRACT

In this paper, old and new ways of thinking about day care are described as "oldthink" and "newthink." Major points of oldthink are that: (1) day care is a social service; (2) day care users are recipients, or at best, clients; (3) day care must be limited to low-income families; (4) licensing should protect children in day care on the legal rationale of "parens patriae"; (5) family problems are a major focus of families using day care; (6) day care is a "necessary evil" when families have problems, the ideal would be care by full-time, nonworking parents; and (7) families that are not eligible for public funds or served by employer day care must purchase their own day care (or stay home). Major points of day care newthink are: (1) day care is needed by every social class; (2) day care users are consumers; (3) day care generates tax dollars through employment; (4) the day care system emphasizes fighting for the rights of the poor; (5) licensure is a consumer protection program; and (6) families choose day care because of benefits to children, regardless of the manner in which parents are employed. Day care newthink is evident in the principles of the Day Care Council of America, the platform of the National Campaign for Child Day Care for Working Parents, and statements by feminist leaders. (BC)

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DAY CARE: OLD THINK AND NEW THINK

by Gwen G. Morgan

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The coming of a new year makes me think of the Australian aborigine who got a new boomerang for Christmas and spent the rest of his life trying to throw the old one away. We badly need new day care policy to meet the changed conditions facing families in 1983. We will be getting new state legislators, new Congressional members, and some new Governors. But we will not get new day care policy unless those making day care policy decisions think about day care in a new way.

There is a day care "newthink" and a day care "oldthink," although not everybody would agree on every detail of what belongs under each of those headings. "Newthink" is not especially new; it has been struggling to be understood for many years. For purposes of stimulating thought and possibly argument, the following impressionistic descriptions of the two ways of thinking about day care policy are attempted below.

Major Points of Child Day Care "Oldthink"

- o Day care is a social service.
- o It may be that at some far-distant future time, child day care will be a public responsibility and available to all. In the short run, however, it is a public responsibility limited to the poor.
- o Those using day care are "recipients" or, at best, "clients."
- o Because public funds are limited, day care must be limited to low-income families.
- o Licensing should protect children in day care, on the legal rationale of "parens patriae," state (or public) intervention on behalf of the child.
- o Quality means combining all the services needed by poor families and delivering them through day care.

Gwen G. Morgan is the Director of The Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education, Wheelock College, Boston, MA. c August 1991. This piece first appeared in Day Care and Early Education magazine in 1982.

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- o Family problems and inadequacies are a major focus for the population using day care.
- o Day care is a "necessary evil" when families have problems; the ideal would be a full-time, non-working parent instead of day care.
- o Families not eligible for public funds are not a major public concern. Employers "should" provide day care for them, and will probably do so when they are educated as to the tax provisions (considered "incentives") and the benefits of day care to the work place.
- o Anyone not eligible for public funds and not helped by employers will just have to buy their own day care (or stay home). However, the growth of for-profit day care for them to buy is deplored.
- o Some day in the future child day care will be either in the schools or the social service system.

Major Points of Child Day Care "Newthink"

- o Child day care is a public social utility needed in every community by every social class. It can help to build community among families.
- o The need for child day care is now, and the short-run solutions are feasible and at hand, through a combination of public and private support with parent responsibility.
- o Those using child day care are consumers, not customers.
- o Child day care is not just one of a range of needed services that cost public dollars (although that is the case for child protection); it also generates the tax dollars, through employment and upward mobility, that pay for social services.
- o Fighting for the rights of poor people is an important emphasis in the struggle for an overall child day care system to serve the whole community. A major right of poor families needing child day care, however, should be the right to become non-poor, through increased earnings. Child day care limited to low-income families thwarts this aim of parents whenever employment is the purpose of their use of child day care. In any service connected to employment opportunity, there should be no limit on what a parent can earn, but instead a sliding fee that enables them to pay what they can for the child day care that makes the earnings possible, up to and including paying the full cost of the service.

o Licensing is a consumer protection program designed to support parents when they seek a day care arrangement for the child that reduces the risk of harm. Together with other regulatory systems applied to child day care, licensing may sometimes create barriers to the growth of the needed service through inappropriate standards, poorly trained staff, a lack of system among the major regulating agencies, or failure to include a consumer role in the system. Regulatory reform is needed to create a stronger consumer protection system.

o Quality means creating a service that will be trusted by all parents regardless of social class. Additional health and social services for poor families are needed by those families and should be delivered to them, but they are not necessarily an integral part of child day care for all families as long as there is access to these services in the community.

o Most families are assumed to be adequate, and in need of support from their community as they perform their basic family functions of child rearing, emotional support to family members, and earning a living. Specialized help is needed only for the percentage of families found to have inadequacies; for them child day care is therapeutic. Day care offers new parents access to older and more experienced parents in the community as well as to staff.

o Families choose day care and nursery school programs because they are beneficial to children, whether the parents work or not. Programs that do not offer these perceived social and educational advantages to children are not necessary evils -- they should be eliminated or improved.

o All families and their ability to perform their functions in society are a public concern. The creation of needed services for families is a community responsibility, even when families are able to pay for the services themselves. In a changing society, both parents and employers need the support of a caring community that plans and assists in the development of needed services. Some employers will create work site child care; they are to be commended and encouraged. Most employers will prefer to work with their communities to voucher parents' choice of care, as they do with the health system under the Blue Cross and similar mechanisms.

o No family is excluded from public concern. The child day care system available to all families should include a widely diverse variety of types of care, including family day care, nursery schools, and full-day centers, provided by any public or private agency. Poor quality services, and any service established primarily to make money at the expense of children, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, are deplored.

o By 1990, communities could create a system that funnels both private and public funds to a diversity of child day care services chosen by parents, without taking away the autonomy of any public system such as the schools or the social service system. This could be done through resource and support focal organizations that assist both parents and providers, plan, assist new program development, and administer vouchers and scholarship assistance to parents for any public or private agency, including the social service system, the work and training system, employers, United Way, churches, other voluntary agencies, and local governments.

What's In a Name?

The term "day care" or "child care" may be passionately preferred these days. Neither is a good one for communicating meaning. "Day care" means the day-time arrangement for people who need care but who live at home with their own families; it is the opposite of "residential care." Unfortunately, it is also used in many other fields, and means care for the aging, the retarded (for whom it connotes a non-educational service for severely impaired individuals), people with serious handicapping conditions. Using "day care" alone will trigger a lot of miscommunication across fields. Further, "day care" carries the freight of present-day biases against nineteenth century institutions, and the stigma of a service for the poor.

For those reasons, many prefer to use the term "child care." That term, too, carries a number of meanings. In the field of child welfare, the term "child care" includes not only day care, but foster care and group residential programs. Used alone, it does not communicate well.

"Extended day" has been suggested, tying day care by implication to the positive and universal qualities of public education and nursery school. That term for some connotes a failure to develop an integrated program across the whole day; it has a tacked-on feel to it.

Newthink probably needs a new term. Until something better comes along, I have been using "child day care."

Where is "Newthink" Found?

The Day Care Council of America's statement of principles, and the platform statement of the National Campaign for Child Day Care for Working Parents are examples of "newthink." "Oldthink" predominates in the child advocacy organizations at present. Many child day care providers have been "newthinkers" struggling against "oldthink" state policies. With the emphasis on day care

policy among feminist leaders it is probable that "newthink" will grow rapidly in politically sensitive offices, like Governor's offices. "Oldthink" will continue to proliferate in traditional Welfare agencies; while some states will have "newthink" policy analysts in less traditional social service agencies.

What is and is not "newthink" and where it will be found is a matter for disagreement and debate. What is clear, however, is that new ideas, new delivery systems, and new policies are needed for child day care right now in 1983, and that some of our policy-makers may have difficulty disposing of their outworn boomerangs.